



## **Stranger Love 2 by Ladey Jezzabella**

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**Summary:** If Anya thought her first dealings with the upside down was tough, she's in for a hell of a surprise. Better the devil you know, right? Sequel to Stranger Love. Billy Hargrove/OC

# 1. Chapter 1

Stranger Love 2

Chapter One – Not so happy ever after

May, 1985

The recurring nightmare remained a prominent feature in Anya's life. Since fighting off the demodogs, and helping El save the small town of Hawkins, Indiana, there had been an ever-pressing darkness on her mind.

It was always the same dream; a shadowy figure looming in the treeline, too far away for her to see any features. A male voice screamed for her help, desperately, and yet all she could do was stand and stare, her feet locked to the ground as if submerged in thick relentless mud.

Whatever her dreams meant they couldn't be a good thing. Despite El managing to close the portal last winter, Anya couldn't help but feel there was an insidious evil lurking just around the corner.

"Anya, breakfast!" Patricia called up the stairs loudly, trying to be heard over Anya's music. She was currently blasting a vinyl of The Cure, one of the albums Steve had let her borrow, bopping around in a rare moment of tranquillity.

"OK Mom!" She replied, as her eyes fell to the letter on her vanity.

Anya had been accepted into the school of her dreams. The Manhattan University of Dance and Arts. The school's logo was stamped in the corner, a stark reminder she had a very big decision to make in the coming months.

She was in no doubt as to how she felt about going to the school. Anya had thought of little else her entire high-school career, working as hard as she possibly could to ensure her grades were top notch. The fact remained, however, that she wasn't normal. Not anymore. The revelation of her abilities and keeping them under control caused

her enough stress, let alone moving all the way to the city of New York. Not many people who lived in Hawkins ever really left, and Anya had never been to the big apple or really...anywhere outside of Indiana and Illinois.

Tucking the letter back into the envelope, Anya let it drop into her top drawer and shut it over. Robert Smith's strange yet melodic vocals ended, along with the record, the black disk spinning to a halt. Anya sighed, grabbing her satchel from the side and running down the stairs.

"Morning Anya," Charles said the moment she entered the kitchen. He was sitting at the table, coffee in one hand and paper in the other. Charles really was a cliché old man. He was her Mom's senior by around ten years, his hair almost fully grey and thinning on the top of his head. He liked to smoke cigars, rant about the economy and read his paper every damn day.

The main thing about Charles though – he loved Patricia. She was like the sun to him and he always had a glint in his eyes when he looked at her. Anya couldn't fault him for this, nor for much else.

"Hey Charles," She responded. He was pretty much a permanent fixture now, since her Mom had finally decided to take a chance on him. "The world going to shit again?"

Charles snorted. "Of course. But what's new?"

"I wish you wouldn't talk about depressing things first thing in the morning," Patricia groaned, sliding onto a seat with her own coffee. It was one of the rare occasions when they were all together to eat, as usually at least one had to be at the diner. This morning, the new guy, Paul, had offered to do an early shift.

"What, like the impending closure of all the small businesses in Hawkins because of this new 'Starcourt' mall?" Charles said through a grin, taking Patricia's hand fondly. "Or the impending nuclear war with Soviet Russia?"

"Yes. All of that," Her Mom warned.

"No one does burgers like we do, Mom. The locals will fawn over this new mall for a while but they'll soon come crawling back," Anya reassured her. It was the elephant in the room in all their current conversation. The new mall was fantastic for the economy and was going to offer loads of jobs for the ever-expanding population – however, the diner was definitely suffering, already. They had their share of regulars, loyal to the end, but those regulars weren't young anymore and soon they were going to need to appeal to a younger audience.

"Yeah..." Patricia answered vaguely, her eyes far away for a moment. Anya knew her Mom would be devastated if her father's diner closed. It was his legacy, a part of him that remained with them always. "Yeah! We'll be fine," She pepped up quickly, loading her plate with bacon. "Eat up,"

Anya had just finished her food when the sound of car horn blared from outside. Rolling her eyes, she got up to pull on her boots, taking one last glug of caffeine as she grabbed her bag. "See you guys later, then,"

Patricia and Charles called their goodbyes, Anya missing their pointed stare to one another. It needn't have mattered. She knew her relationship with the boy sitting impatiently in his car was controversial. Either people completely disapproved, told her he was no good, told her she was 'good for him', told her he would break her heart...the list went on. The girls at school were all ridiculously jealous but that was no surprise. Steve hated his guts, and Gemma tolerated her friend's decision with the threat she would 'tear off his balls and feed them to her cats' if he ever did anything to hurt Anya.

"Finally," Billy Hargrove drawled as she slid into the infamous blue Camaro. "How long do I gotta wait for you?"

"As long as it takes, Hargrove," Anya retorted playfully, seeing the corner of his lips twitch. "Don't I get a good morning kiss?"

"What am I? Your husband?"

"You don't have to be my husband to kiss me in the morning!"

"I might as well be, already got me feeling like you're my ball and chain," Billy said as he flashed her his signature sexy smirk.

"Best ball and chain you'll ever get." Anya mumbled unhappily, crossing her arms with a pout. He swooped over quickly, tilting her head to crash his mouth onto hers, kissing her expertly.

"That better?"

"It will do," She laughed at his deadpan expression, turning to look in the back as she realised something. "Where's Max?"

"She had a sleepover at some girls from school, forgot her name," Billy responded, engine roaring to life as they departed for school. Their last days were fast approaching, the imminent prospect of joining the real world something neither wanted to think about. "Anyway, forget my annoying step sister. There's a gig on tomorrow night at Subside, you wanna go?"

Anya thought about it for moment, realising quite quickly that she had plans with El. "Er, I can't tomorrow, shift at the diner," She lied, feeling that gut wrenching stabbing every time she did so.

"Just ask your Mom if you can skip, she's usually cool with it,"

"Yeah but – the new guy has done a tonne more shifts than he should of, plus Mom and Charles have plans so I can't skip it,"

"Right. You said the same thing last week, and the week before that," Billy was getting frustrated. Anya could hardly blame him – she was being a terrible girlfriend. Her powers and learning to control them seemed to be taking over her social life.

"I know, I'm sorry, you know what it's been like with the new mall opening and everything. What about this weekend? Surely there's a gig on?"

"I can't do this weekend, I got trials for my swimming instructor course, remember?" He said bitingly. "Just fuck it, alright? I thought part of having a girlfriend was actually doing shit with her,"

Anya sighed, running her hands into her hair. "I'm sorry Billy," and

she really was. Billy had been trying so hard with his anger issues, and minus a few cock ups and arguments at the start, their relationship had been really good. He'd also enrolled on a local course to become a lifeguard for the public pool, which would open in a couple of months for summer. "Things are just getting out of hand lately,"

"Yeah whatever. Maybe I'll go ask Carol instead. Or all the other girls at school who would die to go out with me," Billy's words were cutting and full of malice.

"Really? Are you going to start this shit again?" Anya flared angrily. "You're so immature! Fine, if you want to go with fucking Carol, or Tina, be my guest!"

"Don't tempt me, Princess," Billy growled, skidding furiously into the car park and making a couple of younger pupil's scatter before they became roadkill. "At least they know how to have a good time!"

"Fuck you! You always bring that up, like it's my fault the diner is going to shit! Some of us actually care about our family, Billy!"

"You think the diner is going to last? You're all fucking stupid! That place will be closed before Summer even rolls in,"

Anya stared at him for a long moment in utter shock, letting his words sink in. He'd never said anything like that before, never voiced his opinion on the matter – until now. She wrenched open the car door, slamming it over with malicious force. "You're a fucking asshole!"

Billy mirrored her actions. "Yeah well, that should be no surprise to you, should it?"

"Just leave me alone, Billy!" Anya seethed, beginning to stomp away from him.

"Yeah, that's right, fucking walk away like you always do!" He shouted, quite a lot of the student body staring at them. Anya stopped, closing her eyes and clenching her fists, before she turned around to face him.

"I may not be the best girlfriend right now, but I sure as shit would never say something so fucking hurtful like that to you!" She said, levelling up to the curly head boy she called her boyfriend. His eyes were full of rage – clearly he wasn't done with this particular argument.

"I'm not the one sneaking around all the time, telling me you're doing one fucking thing and then disappearing for hours!" He pointed an accusatory finger at her. "Are you fucking another guy, is that it?"

"How could you even ask me that!?" Anya blinked, as tears began to form in her eyes.

"Well you seem to be really pally with Harrington lately. I've seen how he looks at you,"

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm friends with Steve?!"

"How many times do I have to tell you to stay the hell away from him!?"

"You don't tell me what the fuck to do, Billy. I'm not a child and I don't belong to you!" She hissed, starting to see some of the Billy she thought he'd left behind a while ago. He'd always had an issue with Steve and vice versa, but as long as the boys stayed away from each other, they were ok. At least, that's what Anya maybe naively believed. "Stop acting so childish for five minutes,"

"Guys! As much as I hate to get in the middle of this, everyone is staring right now!" Gemma, who'd appeared next to Anya seemingly out of nowhere, hissed in a low voice. "Come on Anya, you two can sort this out later when you've both cooled off," She gripped Anya's forearm and began to drag her inside. She was in too much of an angry haze to protest, as she watched Billy storm past them both to get to his first class.

"So, you gonna tell me what that one was about?" Gemma asked, balancing two heavy books in her arms. Anya felt like smacking her forehead against the lockers in frustration, choosing to slam over the metal door instead as she retrieved her stationary.



"He thinks I'm sleeping with Steve,"

"Oh, that little nugget. Is he ever going to let that go?"

"I just – urgh! So, I'm busy at the moment and haven't been able to see him *every damn day*, I mean that's just life, right?" Anya growled. "It doesn't mean I'm sleeping with someone else!"

Gemma nodded to appease her friend. "True, true. Billy has always been jealous though,"

"Yeah..." Her anger started to dissipate, just slightly. "Why are relationships so hard? I mean, I thought we were getting better you know?"

"Anya, may I be blunt?"

"Are you anything else?"

Gemma chose to ignore Anya's last comment, the two girls pacing the lino towards their first class. "You and Billy fight almost every week. I think you're in denial, honey,"

"We don't fight every week..." Anya trailed off, because Gemma was right. She couldn't think of a single week since they'd gotten together (except maybe the first month or so) that they didn't have a blazing argument about something. "Couples fight, it's healthy. You and Johnny fight!"

"Me and Johnny argue because he insists on commenting on my driving. He's the worst backseat driver I've ever known," Gemma grumbled, though there was a hint of fondness in her brown eyes. She met Johnny after taking her to the garage, where he worked for his Dad. One thing led to another, and now the pair were practically inseparable. "But I guess every couple is different, babe. Some fight more than others, some get married and then the husband bails on his family after 18 years, to marry a floozy who he then subsequently divorces, to which all of his money goes to said floozy and the idiot man comes crawling back thinking he'll be welcomed with open arms by the family he left behind."

Anya wrapped her arm around Gemma's shoulders tightly, knowing

fully well she was talking about her moronic father. "Ah, honey. At least your Mom sent him out on his ass, rather than take him back,"

"I would have knocked seven bells out of her if she had," Gemma agreed, pushing back a tight ringlet from her face (more likely to also catch a stray tear). "Men. Can't live with em' -"

"Can't live without em'," Anya finished, both girls giggling. They sat in their respective seats for first period, the whole class buzzing with impending excitement. School for them would soon be out, and though not everyone was set for the future, everyone was thrilled at the thought of school finally being over.

"Have you decided about college yet?" Gemma asked, Miss James not yet gracing the students with her presence.

"No," Anya sighed softly, flipping her pencil around in her palm. The temptation over the past few months to spill her guts about everything to Gemma had been overwhelming. Her best friend still didn't fully understand her reservations about college, the idea that she didn't want to go a complete mystery.

"Sorry I'm late class!" Miss James stammered as she burst into the room like a flapping pigeon. "I blew a tyre and didn't have a spare,"

"If you like blowing things Miss, I'm right here," Tommy H, still the world's biggest douchebag, hinted with a waggle of his eyebrows and a thrust of his crotch. Gemma hoofed her pen at the back of his head, the plastic stick snapping off his skull with a SNAP.

"OW!" He whined, whipping around to find the culprit and met with sniggers from everyone in the room.

"Believe me Tommy, I would consider your proposal if I thought there was anything there to blow," Miss James deadpanned, further adding to the boy's humiliation as the class all barked with laughter. He sat silently from then on, rubbing the back of his head occasionally as he sulked.

"I'm going to really miss her," Gemma said wistfully, Anya agreeing full heartedly, realising with a stab to her gut that she was also going

to really miss school.

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## 2. Chapter 2

Stranger Love 2

Chapter Two – Basketball and Leroy James

January 1985

"Try and get it off me," Billy grinned at Anya wickedly, dribbling the basketball before her eyes with the skills of a pro. She laughed, attempting to bat it away from his grasp to no avail.

"Billy! Come on!" Her wails of protest made him falter and he let out a teasing sigh.

"Fine, here," Billy handed her the ball, stepping around to press his body behind her. "Remember what I told you, bend your knees and let it go at the last second," His warm breath, that smelt like peppermint gum, hit the side of her neck. Anya felt tingles pulse down her spine. Billy had already told her all of this, he just liked the excuse to be close to her.

"Alright, I think I got it," She murmured, feeling him step away as she looked up at the hoop. With as much precision as possible, Anya pushed it into the air and prayed it would land at least somewhere near her target. With an amazing stroke of luck, the basketball fell through the net and bounced to the ground. She let out a loud whoop, jumping around like a kid at Christmas. "Did you see that?!"

Billy folded his arms as he tried not to grin, though she could tell he was thoroughly amused at her enthusiasm. The afternoon was rolling into evening, the air becoming colder as the sun set over their small neighbourhood. His backyard was filtered in yellow and pastel pink, their shadows casting long shapes over the concrete and dancing around the green lawn. She could see the condensation billowing from their mouths, Billy wrapped up tightly in a coat and Anya the same, more for appearance sake than anything else.

She hardly ever felt the cold anymore.

"Yeah, you're practically LeBron James," Billy quickly grabbed the ball before it took off down the yard.

"If that's a basketball reference I'm just gonna take it as a compliment," Anya shrugged, taking Billy off guard by shoving his shoulder and snatching the ball whilst he was still surprised. "Ha ha!" She roared in triumph, dribbling it a few times. "Looking more like Leroy James by the second,"

He laughed and the sound made her heart flutter, his eyes alight. "It's LeBron James, genius,"

"Well, whatever. I could still take him,"

"Oh yeah, really?" Billy advanced on her quickly, making Anya let out a squeal as she tried to dodge him. Instead of going for the ball, the Californian made a grab for her waist, lifting her feet off the ground.

"This is cheating!" Anya protested through laughs, her arms wrapping around his neck as the basketball bounced onto the grass. Billy ignored her, his eyes growing intense as her feet touched the ground once more. His large hands were on her waist, finding the pockets of her coat to tug her even closer to his warmth.

"Let's go inside and warm up," He suggested with a flirty grin.

"Your folks will be back soon," Anya pointed out.

"I'll put my music on loud,"

"Yeah, cuz that won't be obvious," She rolled her eyes. It was no secret that Neil disapproved of their relationship, for whatever reason. The man just had an agenda against anyone who was happy, and in all honestly, Anya couldn't stand the guy. He'd made Billy's life a living hell for 18 years because he was a sad, angry man with a power trip.

"So, what baby? I have a lock, remember?" Billy tugged her inside, already knowing he had the upper hand. Anya smiled as he kissed her neck, the pair stumbling into the kitchen.

"Ew. Can you guys cut it out?" Maxine's extremely put out voice

sounded, as she closed over the fridge.

"Get lost you twerp," Billy retorted in his usual impatient tone, the redhead rolling her eyes to the heavens with a smirk.

"Hey Max, how are you?" Anya asked between giggles, the young girl carrying a bowl of cereal (despite it being 7pm) in one hand and a can of cola in the other.

"I was good until you two came in drooling over one another. Mum and Neil will be back soon, so you might wanna keep it down," She drawled, neither Billy nor Anya missing the connotations in her words. Max never really understood why Anya continued to date her step brother, after all that went down at the Byers last Autumn. Anya knew the younger girl would understand one day, when she was older and dating – Lucas counted a little bit but he and Max argued more than Anya and Billy, so half the time they were broken up anyway.

"Can't make any promises dipshit," Billy very eloquently replied, quickly grabbing Anya's hand and dragging her into his bedroom.

"See you later Max!" Anya called over her shoulder, before he shut the door with a snap, barely locking it before he was on her lips like a man starved. His coat still clung onto the cold, so she helped him shrug it off quickly, letting him walk her over to the bed. Her limbs gave way and she fell onto it, Billy tumbling atop of her with a slight 'oof'.

"You forgot the music," Anya whispered as she raked her fingers through his curls, nails biting at his scalp.

"Oh shit, yeah," Billy grunted into her mouth, rolling away from her quickly. He misjudged his actions tremendously, tumbling rather ungracefully to the floor and landing on his back with a thump.

Anya held in her laughter all but three seconds. She covered her face with her hands, determined to never forget the image of Billy Hargrove falling flat onto his back out of her memory. It was too classic. She uncovered her eyes to see him standing up, glowering down at her, only serving to make her laugh harder.

"Laugh it up Hammond," He said, throwing on a random cassette. Anya could see the glint in his eyes, which meant he wasn't that mad – not really. She sat up very quickly upon hearing David Bowie's *Life on Mars* filter into the air, immediately standing on his bed to perform with her air guitar whilst singing the words passionately.

"You're literally insane," Billy regarded, being dutifully ignored by her as she bellowed out '*Is there life on MARRRRRRRSS?*' at top volume. He stalked over and grabbed her by the middle, so she effectively doubled over as her arms wound around his neck. She kissed him soundly, dangling her legs from the bed, so engrossed in his kiss that she barely noticed that he had her flat on her back once again in a heartbeat.

Suddenly loud knocking at his bedroom door caused the pair to jump in shock. "BILLY! For god's sake turn that music DOWN!" Neil bellowed from the other side. "And you can tell Anya that she needs to go home, it's a school night and I don't run a motel!"

Billy cursed under his breath before roaring "OK DAD!"

"You have five minutes!" Neil finalised, his footsteps loud even over the music. Billy jumped up, turning his stereo to a rather more acceptable noise level, muttering further profanities. Anya got to her feet, trudging next to the taller boy and putting her arms around his shoulders side on.

"I guess that's the end of that then," She muttered into his sweater.

"I can't wait to get the fuck outta here," Billy said. "The minute I save up enough cash I'm gone,"

"Where would you go?" She inquired, eyes wide in curiosity as she stood in front of him, hands clasping at the thin wool of his jumper loosely.

"Back to California," He mused, looking wistful for a moment as his mind conjured up images of his childhood. "You would love it. Sea, sand. And you can wear a bikini all day long,"

Anya chuckled softly, one of his hands resting on her backside and

giving it a squeeze. "Ah, I see, that's why you want me to go there soooo badly,"

"Fuck right. You could play guitar on the beach writing songs, and watch me kill it out in the surf,"

"So, you've thought a lot about it then, huh?" She asked, picking at a loose thread on his clothes, wondering when the right time would be to tell him she'd applied for a school a very very long way from California.

Billy let out a breathy laugh, the sound resonating through his chest. "Don't worry, I'm not going all starry eyed and mushy on yah. It's just what I imagine, you know?"

She flattened her palms on the flat planes of his pecks, sliding them along to loop up and into his hair. "It's great, I love your imagination,"

"I sense a 'but' coming,"

"But...well, I've been meaning to tell you about something -"

"TIMES UP!" Neil shouted through the door, banging it with his fist a few times. Anya muffled a giggle at the look of pure distaste on Billy's face, shrugging her coat back on and pulling on her boots. There was little point in angering Billy's dad any further. She'd seen the black eyes and bruises on her boyfriend enough times to know it wasn't worth poking the bear.

They tumbled down the stairs one after the other, the sound of the TV emitting from the front room. Susan appeared in the doorway; red hair styled up in a backcombed bun on top of her head, her make-up applied thicker than usual. "Hey Anya, it's nice to see you,"

"Hello Susan," Anya greeted. She had no qualms with the woman, albeit to feel sorry for her.

"How's your Mom? I haven't seen her in a while,"

"She's good thanks, just been busy, you know how it is," the small talk was kind of painful, and it was obvious the redheaded woman



wished to ask Anya something else.

"If that's all Susan, I gotta get Anya back," Billy interrupted, probably hoping his father wouldn't appear to make a mountain out of a mole hill.

"Oh, yes, I know, just – Anya, well, since you and Billy are properly coupled up now, I thought we could have you over for dinner on Thursday night?" Susan asked this with slightly wide eyes and hope in her gaze.

"Are you joking?" Billy gave a sardonic laugh. "Not a chance in hell,"

"Excuse me, I think I can answer for myself," Anya retorted, shooting him a warning glare.

"Anya, come on, let's go-"

"Billy, think before you continue that sentence," Neil voiced, looming in the doorway behind Susan. Billy immediately bristled, his eyes training on his Dad's as they both shared equally angry glares. "Susan is trying to do a nice thing for you, and all I hear is you talking back with no respect whatsoever,"

"I didn't mean -"

"Billy!" Anya said suddenly, all eyes flashing to her. "It's alright! Susan, I would love to come over for dinner on Thursday, it sounds like a great idea, thank you,"

"Wonderful," Susan beamed brightly, placing her hand on her husband's arm. "We'll be glad to have you,"

"I'm looking forward to it," Anya nearly had to grit her teeth whilst she lied, pushing at Billy's shoulder to usher him outside. His fists were clenched tightly, body rigid with tension and anger that she knew was only going to fester if they didn't get the hell out of there.

The cool night air hit them both, Billy zipping up his jacket as they made the long journey...next door to her house. He was quiet, and Anya knew when Billy Hargrove was quiet, he was really pissed off. "Sorry Billy, I didn't know what else to do,"

"Yeah, well agreeing to a fucking family dinner was a great move," He growled.

"It's just one dinner, maybe it won't be so bad?" Anya suggested as they stood on the front porch, the small light above the door casting warm ambers across Billy's tanned skin. He let out an unamused laugh, flicking open his lighter to ignite a cigarette.

"You think? Look, Susan has it in her head that we can all be one 'big, happy family'. It's bullshit. I don't want any part of her deluded little fantasy,"

"I know you're worried that she thinks she can replace your Mom -"

"This has nothing to do with my Mom, don't fucking bring her up again," Billy hissed rather harshly, Anya wincing at his tone. A look of guilt flashed over his features and his eyes softened. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that,"

"It's ok, I probably shouldn't have said it anyway," Anya leant against the wooden barrier fencing of the porch, looking out into the night for a moment. She smiled softly as she reached a realisation, Billy cocking his eyebrow.

"What you smiling about?"

"It's just...I've never been out with a guy this officially. I'm actually going to dinner with your folks," She laughed as he threw his head back with a groan, a puff of smoke leaving his lips. "What should I wear?"

Billy pressed her against the fence, eyes full of mischief. "Preferably, I'd have you tied to my bed naked for the rest of your life, but we can't have everything,"

"Touche' Hargrove." She said in a low voice, pecking his lips. "Isn't life just a bitch?"

His laugh followed her all the way into her dreams that night.

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### 3. Chapter 3

Stranger Love 2

Chapter Three - Steve Harrington

May 1985

The shrill sound of the phone on his nightstand had Steve jumping up in bed like a whippet, eyes bleary as he tried to adjust to the light of morning streaming through haphazardly drawn curtains.

Ever since the demodogs, the upside down and the mess that came with it, he'd been on edge. He knew first-hand what horrors could lurk in the shadows, how the irrational fear of the dark may not be so irrational after all. There were government cover ups, people who had genuinely lost their lives, and the threat of being arrested and put away for good if he ever broke his promise of silence.

In retrospect, Steve suspected this may have been the reason he completely canned his chances of getting into college. His grades were shocking, and with them, the whole of his future effectively poured down the drain.

Was it his fault if he'd realised there was more to life than grades? What did college matter, when there were massive forces of evil right under everyone's noses? The simple fact concluded he had lost all sight of his old life, for a newer, far more exciting one lay directly ahead.

With a slight groan, Steve reached over and grabbed the receiver. The curly cord was completely tangled around itself, giving it little to no slack. "Sup?" he said groggily.

"Oh, sorry Steve, did I wake you up?" The sound of Anya Hammond's voice on the other end had him wide awake in less than a second.

"What? No, no no. I was awake," He lied, rather uselessly as he heard her chuckle.

"I keep forgetting not everyone gets up at stupid o'clock like me," She

sounded a little deflated. "Are you busy today?"

"No, not busy. What'd you have in mind?"

"I need to talk to you about something...can we meet at the diner, say 30 minutes?"

"Sure thing." Steve agreed, hanging up the phone and jumping straight out of bed. He felt a familiar little jig of nerves dance through his stomach, the type he would normally get if he was going on a date. Except this wasn't a date, just a casual meet up between friends.

Friends being the operative word, because Anya currently dated the douchebag of the century – Billy Hargrove. Steve couldn't think of anyone he disliked more, and he'd been pals with Tommy H for most of his High School life. What Anya saw in a guy like Billy, Steve had absolutely no idea. She deserved a hell of a lot better, and he would be lying if he said it didn't make him angry and jealous.

"Get a grip, Harrington," Steve muttered to himself, shooting some Farrah Faucet spray into his damp locks. "There are plenty more girls out there, just waiting for a guy like you to come along," He styled his hair in the bathroom mirror expertly, giving himself one last look over of approval before pulling open his bedroom door.

He nearly had a heart attack when he came face to face with his Dad on the other side. "Jesus!"

"Where are you going, Steve?" his father asked in his deep, monotone voice, standing at least two inches shorter than his son. Mr Gerald Harrington, another massive douchebag in Steve's life, folded his arms over his chest as he regarded his son.

"Out," Steve replied nonchalantly, slipping past his father with no intention of speaking to him.

"Now wait one minute there Steve, we need to have a serious talk!" He called as he followed him down the massive staircase, into the foyer.

"Not now, Dad, alright?"

"Steve Harrington! You stop right there! Before you go off galivanting with whoever it is you choose to spend your time with, I think you need to hear what I've got to say!" Gerald bellowed, halting Steve in his tracks. He felt his heart sink, knowing that this was it. This was the 'talk' they'd put off for so long, the one where his father would tell him to go buy a suit and begin working for him immediately. Steve had no desire to work in a law firm for the rest of his life, but at least it was a fall back, something he could do until he found his true calling.

"Ok, ok. I'm all ears," Steve said, watching as his father ran a hand through his thick black hair, now painted with strands of silver.

"Me and your Mom were extremely disappointed in you, Steve. Barely graduating? Failing to even scrape the grades for college? I thought we'd raised you to know better," His Dad's voice had the trademark tone of condescension, the one that grated Steve's nerves and made his temper flare.

"Yeah? Well if you and Mom were ever actually here in the first place, you might have noticed I was struggling!" He retorted. "All you do is work, you don't care about anything else,"

"Oh, so I suppose you'd rather live in squalor, then? Who do you think pays for the roof over your head? For your car? For all the things you own!? You need to grow up, Steve, and realise that money doesn't grow on trees!" Gerald stalked forwards. "You're eighteen now, I am perfectly within my rights to kick you out on your ass!"

"Then do it! Save yourself the burden of having me as a son!" Steve growled, his hand on the solid oak doors standing grandly at the opening of their three-story plantation house. Everything within Steve's sight seemed alien to him now, as if he had no right to look at the expensive furnishings, or the ornate chandelier sparkling brightly above his head. It all seemed so pointless now, so *shallow*.

"I am not finished talking to you!" His father bellowed, his voice echoing around the walls. "I'm not going to kick you out. Your mother would never allow it. And since you are intent on acting like a child, I will have to teach you a lesson,"

"What do you mean?"

"You're cut off. I am no longer funding a boy who has nothing to show for himself," Gerald pointed his large finger at Steve's chest. "That means no more allowance. You either get a job and pay for things yourself, or you'll have nothing,"

"But - but I thought you want me to work for you!?" Steve exclaimed in utter shock, feeling as if the rug had been thoroughly yanked beneath his feet.

"Isn't that just the rub, son? You've lived under the illusion your future will just be handed to you on a silver platter. No more. It's time you joined the real world, and started appreciating the value of a dollar,"

"That's complete bullshit, Dad!"

"My word is final, Steve, and don't you forget it. I won't be taking it back, and don't bother trying to plead with your mother, because she agrees with me," His father tugged at Steve's car keys, hanging up by the front door, and tossed them toward him. "You'd better save that gas, son, until you have the funds to fill her up again,"

Steve caught the jangling keys in his hand, glaring at his father's retreating form. Of all the shit he thought his Dad might throw at him, this was one stinking pile he hadn't anticipated in the slightest. Internally panicking, he ran his hand into his hair in frustration, tempted to stamp his foot. The action would only prove to his father that he was a spoilt entitled child, so instead he slammed the front door behind him as hard as he could.

Luckily the tank in his BMW was full, giving him one less thing to worry about for now. Steve sat in the front seat for a moment, then in a rare expression of rage, beat the steering wheel furiously with his fists. He roared in sheer frustration, a hopeless weight settling on his shoulders. His only consolation was Anya, whom would be surely waiting for him by now.

The drive to Benny's wasn't far, taking him less than ten minutes to skid into the parking lot. Steve felt his anger ceasing as he looked

over the familiar building, a staple within the Hawkins community for so long.

Anya sat in a booth to the right of the diner, blue eyes down as she stared into her large mug of coffee. Tendrils of her dark, wild curly hair framed her face, the rest pulled back into a French plait trailing between her shoulder blades. Steve had to force a deep breath, willing himself to bury his feelings for her once again, but it was getting harder and harder to do so the more they hung out.

"Hey," He said as he slid opposite her, as her eyes snapped up to meet his. She looked tired, he thought immediately. "Sorry I'm late,"

"Oh hey, it's no problem," Anya chimed in her bell like voice, taking a big glug of her caffeine, before her pretty features crinkled into a look of suspicion. "What's the matter?"

"Huh? What do you mean? I'm good," Steve shrugged.

"No, there's something wrong, I can tell by your face,"

"This is just – just my face!" He stammered, her eyes penetrating him like a goddamn X-ray. "Urgh, ok, fine. Shit just hit the fan at home,"

"Uh oh. Was it your Dad?" Anya asked, suddenly diverting her attention. "Louie? Can we get another coffee over here please?" She called out, followed by a guy in his late twenties giving her a thumbs up from behind the counter.

"Yah. He erm...well, the asshole cut me off." Steve said glumly, slightly embarrassed, if he were honest with himself.

"Cut you off?" She looked confused and he couldn't help but admire how adorable she was.

"Yeah, as in, no more allowance. So, no money for gas, clothes, anything. I'm screwed. And you know what he said? He said he's 'teaching me a lesson', for shitting on my chance at going to college,"

"But...I thought you were going to work for him? Doesn't he own his own law firm?"

"Oh no, it's part of my punishment. I have to get a job on my own, to prove myself to him or some bullshit." He grumbled, as a hot cup of coffee was slid in front of him. "Thanks,"

"Oh Steve, this is Louie, he just started," Anya introduced, Steve nodding to the older man in acknowledgment. He was tall and punk looking, with shaggy black hair and tattoos spiralling up his arms. If he didn't get the locals talking, Steve didn't know what would, but the Hammond's never did things in the conventional way.

"Sup man," Louie clapped Steve on the back hard, sending him shooting forwards and spluttering his coffee. "And hey, don't worry. My old man cut me off too, otherwise I'd be up to my eyeballs in cash,"

Anya covered her mouth, presumably to hide a smile, as Louie flashed her a wink. He walked off as a few costumers ambled in, Steve glowering into his drink for a moment, not used to being the butt of people's jokes.

"Ah, I'm sorry about him Steve, he was only joking," Anya said, sliding her hand over his comfortingly.

His heart leapt into his throat at her warm touch, her skin at least two degrees higher than what was considered normal. "I know what you're thinking. Poor rich kid, finally has to face the real world,"

"Steve, I never said that," She squeezed his hand. "We just have to be pragmatic about this now. You need to find a job – oh! What about at the mall? I mean the place has kind of ruined us, but there's got to be loads of jobs going there, right?"

"I mean, yeah I guess working at the mall wouldn't be so bad..." Steve murmured. "I could apply to manage one of the stores, you know, have my own crew working for me-"

"Steve, I was thinking more along the lines of you *being one of the crew*," Anya said with an amused grin. "You need experience to become a manager,"

"Oh, shit...yeah you're right. So, I get experience first then," Steve



nodded, getting carried away imagining himself in an expensive suit, walking around his store with nods and smiles from the entire staff. "I can totally do that and endorse this place at the same time!"

"Steve! You can't do that, you'll get fired!" Anya cried as she giggled, her face lighting up in the most beautiful way. "Jeeze, you've really never had a job before, have you?"

He shrugged, feeling a little light headed from the realisation he hadn't eaten any breakfast. He felt much better having spoken to her, the weight he'd felt on his shoulders lightening with possibilities. Maybe there was a light at the end of the tunnel?

Anya sank back in the booth after a moment, looking thoughtful as she spoke "Have you got a resume?"

Steve snorted. "No, what do I need one of those for?"

"Ah Jesus." Anya smacked her forehead dramatically. "We've got our work cut out,"

"Will you help me?"

"Of course. Although you're a bit of a case so..." Her mouth curled into a teasing smirk, as he narrowed his gaze at her playfully.

"So, enough about me. What did you want to talk about?" Steve decided to change the topic, eyes scouring the breakfast menu greedily.

Anya shrunk further into the booth, her eyes falling to Louie who had re-appeared to take their order. "Can I have pancakes? And one bacon, egg and cheese on a sesame bagel, thanks," She ordered for Steve, who raised his eyebrow at her. "What? You're really predictable when it comes to food, Steve,"

"True," He agreed. "So? You gonna talk or do I have to shake it out of you?"

"You're going to think I'm crazy. Well, more than usual," She muttered, tugging at the end of her braid. "You know the nightmares I've been having? The ones with the screaming guy and darkness and

just pure 'upside down' nonsense?"

"Yeah?"

"I woke up the other morning and my bed sheets were on fire. I mean, literally on fire. I had to put it out with a jug of water. Mom nearly had a panic attack because it's what used to happen before...before they took the memories away..." She bit her bottom lip anxiously. "I had to tell Charles I'd been smoking and the cigarette landed on the bed, you know?"

"Jesus," Steve felt his mind reeling.

"I'm not even close to the worst bit. Last night, my dream was more vivid. Remember when we were in the tunnels, last year? That really strange feeling of not quite being in this world? It was like that only...worse. Darker. There wasn't just one guy screaming for help, it was a whole crowd of them, all screaming and shouting in the trees. I just, couldn't take it anymore, I wanted them to stop, you know? So, I set the trees on fire, to shut them up..." Anya took a breath. "And when I woke up, I was in the forest and the trees were *actually on fire*. I'd been sleep walking and set the fucking forest on fire..."

She trailed off, eyes flitting randomly from the floor to the table, anywhere but his. Steve wasn't sure what to say as he processed the information, trying to formulate something, anything, that may help. Anya was clearly distressed by her revelation, and though she tried to hide it well, Steve always noticed when she was upset. "Anya..."

"I know." She sighed. "I'm so tired, and I can't think straight anymore, and I'm terrified to go to sleep in case I set something on fire and don't wake up. I could kill someone. Mum, Charles, anyone."

"You're not gonna do that," Steve cried out a bit loudly, lowering his voice quickly. "I know you, Anya. You would never hurt anyone, not even in your sleep,"

"We don't know that, Steve. Not for sure," Anya pushed her empty coffee cup away.

"Did you talk to El – Jane? About all this?"

"I don't want to burden her with this stuff, she's trying to live a normal life away from the crazy,"

"I thought my problems were bad." Steve deadpanned, feeling guilty he'd been so put out earlier over something as stupid as having to find a job.

"Your problems are just as valid." Anya said, ever the diplomatic one. "But...well, I kind of had an idea,"

Steve leant forwards, completely intrigued. "Oh? Do tell,"

"Me, El and Kali were all held in the same place, with doctors and nurses and really clever people who may, or may not, have left records of our time there," Anya clasped her hands together and placed them in front of her. "Do you follow?"

"Er..." He faltered, wracking his few brain cells to try and figure out her meaning. "Oh! The Hawkins Lab?"

"Bingo! If there is any information on my abilities, it's got to be there,"

"But, didn't that place get shut down after El closed the gate?"

"Yes. Which means we're gonna have to break in,"

"Right. And this 'we' includes me, doesn't it?" Steve sighed, sagging against the back of the booth in defeat. "When do we go, then?"

"I'm thinking, tonight."

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